

# ***Frequently Asked Alternate Assessment Questions: Maine's Answers***



## **Why is it so important to include all students in state level assessment?**

- **Students who are tested are those who get taught.** When all students, including those with disabilities or English as a Second Language, are tested, and when their assessment results are counted in the total of a school or district, decisions are made and policies set that reflect the needs of all students. If some students are excluded, or when their scores don't count, they are less likely to be considered when decisions are made that affect teaching and learning.
- **Data on student performance is necessary to determine whether, and to what degree students are learning.** Because many students with unique learning needs have not been assessed on the general curriculum, information is often scant or non-existent on whether, and how much, they have learned in academic subjects during their time in public education. While diagnostic assessments, progress reports, annual reviews and periodic evaluations may be useful, they typically focus on areas of a students' uniqueness or disability and the resulting learning needs, rather than on the progress he or she is making in the general curriculum. As a result, it has been difficult to determine whether special education and other support services have been successful in addressing the academic needs of the student.
- **Inclusion in assessments also promotes other inclusive opportunities.** In order to involve all students in the same curriculum, it makes sense to design inclusive instruction activities in the general education setting, whenever possible, in which all students can participate at a level that challenges them. Even students with the most significant disabilities can participate in the general curriculum with appropriate supports and accommodations.
- **Professional development enhances the quality of instruction.** Special educators and other educators supporting students with unique learning needs are already skilled at providing accommodations, or modifying and adapting instruction and assessment for students. Typically, though, they are less often a part of discussions at the local level to develop and align curriculum, instruction and assessment for all students. The requirement to include all students in the general curriculum and to have individual goals and objectives focus on academics has provided opportunities for all educators to be talking the same language – that of standards based education for all students.
- **Because it's the law.** Federal laws governing No Child Left Behind (Title I), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) and State Legislation Reg. 131 of the Maine Learning Results state that all students, including students with disabilities and English as a Second Language (ESL) are to be assessed against the "general

curriculum". In Maine the local general curriculum must be aligned with and incorporate the Content Standards and Performance Indicators in the Learning Results.

## **What is Alternate Assessment?**

Alternate Assessment in Maine is a means of collecting information to assess progress towards Maine's *Learning Results* Content Standards for students whose exceptionality requires accommodations that are so significant that they compromise the content validity of the assessment (i.e., student would need accommodations not listed in "Policies and Procedures for Accommodations and Alternate Assessment to the MEA"). Use of an alternate assessment must be identified and described in the student's Individual Education Plan.

## **What Does the Maine's Personalized Alternate Assessment Portfolio (PAAP) Measure?**

The Maine Alternate Assessment is called the Personalized Alternate Assessment Portfolio and is a collection of student work that provides evidence of progress towards Content Standards in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, and Social Studies. These four content areas are those for whom individual scores are reported on the State assessment, the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA). Scoring is based on PAAP rubrics and results will be aggregated as part of the MEA reporting system beginning with the 2003–2004 school year.

## **How Is A PAAP Developed?**

Teams (educators, parents and when possible students) using recommended strategies and tools, determine if the PAAP is the most appropriate avenue of State assessment for a student and if so, in which of the four content areas. Once the decision is made, educators, working with the students, provide instruction and collect samples of resulting work related to the Content Standards and Performance Indicators identified as most appropriate for that student. Evidence is gathered throughout the school year in which the student is in grade 4, 8 or 11. In the spring of the year Maine educators score the portfolios with results reported the next year.

## **Who Should Use the PAAP Avenue?**

Maine has made a commitment to ensure that all its students participate in the State assessment. Students participate through one of three avenues – standard administration, administration with accommodations or through alternate assessment. Those students who participate in alternate assessment are those for whom accommodations needed are so significant that they compromise the content validity of the MEA (i.e., student would need accommodations not listed in "Policies and Procedures for Accommodations and Alternate Assessment to the MEA"). Most frequently these very few students are students with significant disabilities, Limited English Proficient students who have virtually no command of the English language and possibly students identified under Section 504.

Teams must make decisions for the student in each subject area assessed by the PAAP. For example, a student may require a PAAP for English Language Arts but may be able to participate in the rest of the MEA with accommodations.

## **How Will the PAAP Be Scored?**

Each spring Maine educators are brought together to score student alternate assessment portfolios. Portfolios are scored using a set of criteria outlined in PAAP rubrics. The rubrics are based on Content Standards and Performance Indicators for each of the grade spans (PK-2, 3-4, 5-8, and 9-12) in the Maine *Learning Results* and articulate four levels of performance. Training in reliable scoring is provided to all scorers and two separate individuals score student work to agreement. These scores are then aggregated into the MEA reporting system.

## **How Are Results of the PAAP Reported?**

Each year, parents, schools and districts will be sent the results for students who were assessed through the PAAP. Beginning in 2003-2004 the scores of these students will be included for accountability purposes with scores of other students who take the MEA in school, district and statewide results.